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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002610

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: MIDNIGHT BANGKOK CLASH LEADS TO EMERGENCY DECREE

REF: A. BANGKOK2593 (POLICE UNABLE TO TAKE CONTROL)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2575 (WARRANTS BUT NO ARRESTS)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2555 (POLICE AND PAD COEXIST)
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 2546 (PAD PROTESTS CHALLENGE PM SAMAK)
[1](#)E. BANGKOK 2405 (TENSIONS ESCALATE AT STREET PROTESTS)

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Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: After a desultory 12 hour parliamentary debate on the ongoing political crisis ended without resolution after midnight early on September 1, action returned to the streets in the early hours of September 2. Violence erupted between pro and anti government street factions near the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) rally site at Makkhawan Bridge, resulting in one death and some 40 injured. In response, Prime Minister Samak invoked an emergency decree at 0700, appointing Royal Thai Army (RTA) Commander Anuphong to be in charge of restoring order. With rumors of potential coups once again winding up the Bangkok rumint mill, and a general strike by state enterprise unions called for September 3, Anuphong gave a reassuring press conference mid-afternoon regarding the minimalist role he planned for the army, and reinforced it in private with Ambassador: he would create enough security space for a political solution; there would be no coup. Ambassador also raised U.S. concerns with Parliamentary Opposition leader Abhisit and elder statesman Anand and reiterated our message to the media: we are listening to all sides while stressing the need to resolve the crisis peacefully, within the constitution, and upholding the rule of law.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: It is encouraging that as stable a hand as Anuphong's is on the rudder as Thailand sails through increasingly choppy waters, but it is unclear what political resolution might be in the offing in the face of the current deadlock. To have successful talks, both sides must be willing to listen and engage, and we agree with former PM Anand that Samak neither listens nor engages. Most indications are that Samak's People's Power Party (PPP) intentionally set loose their own street gang, known as the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), to create the bloody incident early September 2 that led to the Emergency Decree. With cynical manipulators on both sides -- PAD and UDD/PPP -- willing to shed the blood of their own

foot soldiers and tactically seek out conflict for strategic advantage, the September 2 clash will likely not be the last.

We will continue to emphasize our core message to all parties in the coming days. End Summary and Comment.

There Will Be Blood

13. (SBU) A street brawl erupted shortly after 1 am September 2 between supporters of the PAD and its pro-government UDD rival (Note: UDD is sometimes referred to as DAAD - Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship), leading to one fatality and 44 injuries. An eye-witness told us that police put almost no resistance when the UDD group, armed with metal pipes and traveling via truck and motorcycles from their initial Sanam Luang rally point, approached two lines of police that separated them from the PAD's Makkhawan Bridge rally point. Media eyewitnesses identified several MPs from the ruling PPP party coordinating movements of the UDD group.

PAD supporters, with wooden wood clubs and other weapons, then converged on the UDD once they had passed through the police lines. The witness told us that the UDD demonstrators retreated once gunshots were heard; both sides later denied they were responsible.

14. (U) After two hours of consultations with security chiefs, Prime Minister Samak Sundaravet declared a state of emergency in Bangkok the morning of Sept. 2. The emergency decree restricts public gatherings "for unlawful purposes" of more than five people or dissemination of news likely to panic the public or instigate violence, and bans unauthorized entry to government facilities. Samak appointed RTA Commander Anuphong to head the emergency decree enforcement team, with DPM/Minister of Interior Kowit Wattana and First Regional Army Commander Prayuth Chanocha as his deputies. The decree

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also gives Anuphong the authority to shut down roads as he sees fit. A subsequent MFA briefing (below) clarified this proviso would only be invoked if demonstrators started to enter Bangkok from the countryside.

MFA explains the Decree

15. (C) MFA PermSec Virasakdi Futrakul briefed the DCM and other members of the diplomatic corps late Sept. 2 about the state of emergency declaration. Virasakdi stressed that the declaration was permitted by the constitution and that all actions taken would conform to the rule of law. The Cabinet had approved the declaration, which would be in force for three months unless rescinded once the conflict had been resolved. The government's goal in declaring the state of emergency was to prevent further violence and maintain a buffer between pro- and anti- government supporters. Viraskadi stressed that the declaration would only be in force in certain districts of Bangkok.

16. (C) Virasakdi said that the army's only role under the state of emergency would be in support of the police and would only utilize unarmed troops who had been trained as peacekeepers. Soldiers would wear body armor and carry shields for protection. Virasakdi said the Ministry of Interior was working with provincial governors to try to convince people from coming to Bangkok to join one of the two sides in the conflict. He also said discussions would be ongoing tonight with the state enterprises to attempt to resolve the threatened strikes.

The prelude to violence

17. (U) The newly explosive events came after a relatively quiet weekend marked by what observers called fruitless parliamentary debate August 31 on ending the crisis. Buoyed by a coalition expression of confidence in his leadership, PM Samak rejected a call by Democrat Party Abhisit Vejjajiva to dissolve the House to end the political crisis during the marathon 12 hour joint session of the House and Senate.

Abhisit claimed that an election would put the Democrat Party at a disadvantage, but the prime minister needed to take responsibility for the current problems. Samak refused, replying that House dissolution would be victory for the PAD.

¶18. (U) The early Sept. 2 clash followed a small explosion inside a police booth near the Makkhawan Bridge 24 hours earlier, at 1:15 am Sept. 1. Nobody was inside the booth when the bomb exploded, but nearby windows were shattered. PAD leadership immediately denied responsibility for the bombing, with Chamlong Srimuang claiming the bomb was designed to "paint a bad reputation of the PAD," and Somsak Kosaiyasuk said he thought the bomb was intended to scare people from joining the PAD rally.

Who sparked the latest clash?

¶19. (C) While we have no concrete evidence, there are several indications that the ruling PPP may have been complicit in the early Sept. 2 clash, goading their street fighters into conflict in a similar dynamic which unfolded in Udon Thani in July (ref E). An Australian diplomat told us that PPP MPs canceled a series of scheduled meetings at the last moment late September 1. Surasee Kosolnavin, Acting Commissioner of the National Human Rights Commission, told us Sept. 2 that PPP members had summoned Khon Rak Udon (KRU) members (Ref E) to Bangkok to confront the PAD. He said that clash involved KRU members who were led by impeached Human Rights Commissioner Charan Dittha-aphichai and two other PPP members; Nation journalist Kavi Chongkittavorn made the same allegation. Various media observers on the scene identified several PPP MPs from Si Sa Ket and Nakhon Ratchasima coordinating the UDD movement from Sanam Luang to Makkhawan Bridge. Palace liaison officer Anuporn Kashemsant alleged to us that ministers had been involved; PAD cited deputy Transportation Minister Songsak Thongsri as a guilty party.

¶10. (C) Surasee said he believed that the Samak government was aware of the movement of KRU members to Bangkok and

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confirmed the report that police had not made an effort to prevent the violence; Deputy Police Commissioner Chong Rakchuthanon had allowed them to march freely. Surasee cited the July 24 Udon rally as the model of pro-government thugs acting in complicity with police as model replayed in Bangkok.

A hot and dry day to come, or something more serious?

¶11. (U) Even before the latest clash, the State Enterprise Union Confederation (SEUC), with 43 unions and 200,000 members, announced a general strike for September 3 in support of the PAD's announced goal of bringing down the government. They threatened to cut water and electricity to all government buildings and suspend most bus service in Bangkok. Thai Airways unions announced a work slowdown for the same day.

¶12. (C) Army General Anuphong, who in recent weeks has thrown cold water publicly and privately on suggestions of a possible coup, reiterated that message in a Sept. 2 press conference and a subsequent joint meeting with Ambassador and UK Ambassador Quayle. The Ambassadors expressed regret for the imposition of a state of emergency, stressed the need to respect Thailand's constitution and democratic institutions, underscored the damage another coup would have for Thailand's international reputation, tourism, and investment climate, and warned the US and UK would be bound to impose measures in response, as we had in 2006.

¶13. (C) Anuphong gave assurances that he shared the same perspective; there would be no coup. He explained that he defined his role under the decree as providing enough security and space for a political resolution to the crisis.

He planned for minimal involvement of the army; the police bore the chief responsibility of keeping order in the streets.

¶14. (C) Ambassador underscored the same U.S. message in subsequent meetings with Democrat Party Leader Abhisit Vejjajiva, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, and former PM Anand Panyarachun. Both agreed that a coup was not the answer to Thailand's current political impasse, but both seemed at wit's end to come up with political ways forward out of the impasse. Anand said that there needed to be a truce before negotiations could begin, but that Samak was inclined neither to listen nor to engage, making a negotiated solution a tall order. Abhisit claimed that, after the middle of the night violence which he alleged was orchestrated by the PPP, his parliamentary debate suggestion that Samak dissolve parliament and call new elections might not be enough, since that would leave Samak in place as acting PM in the 60 day interim, and many people now felt Samak must go.

¶15. (C) Earlier Sept. 2, Human Rights Commissioner Surasee had told us that his military contacts had suggested a plan was in the works to seek royal authorization for an action to replace Samak with former PM Anand, who played a similar role in 1991 and again in 1992. It would not be a real coup, his contacts claimed, since the constitution would stay largely intact, though needing an amendment to allow non-MP Anand to serve as PM. Anand acknowledged to Ambassador that he had received many visitors in recent days, including some who had sought to involve him in the current drama; Anand claimed he resisted such efforts and kept his distance. At the end of the conversation, however, Anand circled back to the issue unbidden: "I cannot rule out regime change, but it would not be a traditional coup d'etat." "A coup is bad idea in any form," Ambassador replied. Anand nodded.

¶16. (U) Note: After the Abhisit meeting, Ambassador underscored our policy to the media waiting outside: we were listening to the views of all parties; we were passing the same message to all: the current situation needed to be resolved by Thais in a peaceful manner, within the constitution, and upholding the rule of law.

JOHN